



HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2011-2016



This document sets out our plans for tackling homelessness in the borough of Reigate and Banstead for the next five years.

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Introduction

We are very pleased to have produced this Homelessness Strategy, which sets out what we plan to do in Reigate & Banstead to tackle homelessness and help those households facing this most extreme form of housing need whether statutory or non statutory homeless.

Since we published our first strategy eight years ago, our services have moved on significantly. In particular, we have been successful in preventing homelessness amongst those who come to us, and to our partner agencies, for help.

Over the past eight years excellent progress has been made by the Council, in partnership with other agencies and organisations, to address homelessness issues locally. Preventing homelessness is not, however, easy and we acknowledge it is a task that cannot be successfully undertaken by any one organisation alone. Partnership working has been and will continue to have an important influence on our success.

During 2008 we conducted a review of homelessness in the borough. This was undertaken through consultation with service users, staff and partner agencies as well as having regard to relevant statistics and reports. Service users offered personal views and accounts of their experiences of local services as well as various stakeholders and partner agencies. These have fed into the review process and helped us to develop our new strategy.

One of the Council's objectives remains effectively tackling homelessness and minimising its effects on individuals and the wider community. We are committed to preventing homelessness wherever possible and finding appropriate interventions to achieve this.

Our intention is to drive forward future improvements to our services to those people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, by meeting the aims contained within this strategy's Delivery Plan.

The first four chapters lay out the priorities for the next five years including the delivery plan. The following five chapters review the work and results achieved over the past eight years and further outline the ongoing work and development of the service.

I. Priorities

This Strategy will build on the very positive work undertaken to date, ensuring that a long term vision is taken and that the homelessness service is robust and responsive to changing needs. The Council is determined to continue working with all relevant partner organisations and build further on links already in place. Partnership is a key theme in this document and one that we believe is central to delivering a successful and modern housing service to our customers.

The Council will not be complacent: we recognise there are a number of areas where more work is needed and improvements to be made.

These will be addressed through the Homelessness Strategy Delivery Plan which will steer the Homelessness Strategy to success.

The Council recognises that homelessness hinders individual and community growth. Its effects on individuals are not limited to housing but to health, training, education and overall self esteem. We recognise that solving one problem in isolation is not a satisfactory remedy and that people must be given choices and options. The Council's vision is to have the correct partnerships in place to maximise the potential for people to have a settled and secure home and enjoy the resulting benefits for themselves and society as a whole.

The aim of the strategy is to prevent homelessness wherever possible through the provision of appropriate advice and support to those at risk.

Early intervention and strong partnership working is essential to effectively tackling all forms of homelessness during the coming years. Increasing customer options and capturing information early, so that resources can be deployed effectively, are also integral themes. The strategy also takes into account that housing and combating homelessness are not just about handing over keys. The strategy therefore endorses the need to address the relationship between homelessness and access to a range of other services and options.

With this in mind, the following overarching themes have been established and underpin the Homelessness Strategy and Delivery Plan.

1. Develop the Housing Options approach
2. Strengthen partnership working
3. Engage the private rented sector
4. Increase the supply of and maximise the use of existing affordable housing
5. Deliver efficient customer focused services

The themes are entirely consistent with the Council's overarching aims and objectives as well as those at the regional and national levels.

Theme 1: Develop the Housing Options Approach

The work of the Housing Options team in providing high quality housing advice is critical to preventing homelessness. We are committed to developing and enhancing this role. Our priorities are: -

- Investigate new ways to prevent homelessness as a result of parent, relative or friend eviction
- Develop services geared to assist people at risk of homelessness due to mortgage repossession
- Improve communication with customers
- Investigate ways to support households at risk of repossession
- Make the best use of government initiatives aimed at preventing homelessness amongst owner occupiers such as the Mortgage Rescue Scheme and Repossession Prevention Fund
- Improve access to education training and employment for homeless households through the Trailblazer and other programmes
- Develop Housing Options staff through effective training
- Continue to maintain an effective working relationship with the Housing Benefit Team

Theme 2: Strengthen Partnership Working

Dealing effectively with homelessness requires a multi-agency approach. We believe homelessness can only be prevented in partnership to holistically address the needs of our customers. Our priorities are: -

- Introduce more joint working protocols with key partners to ensure customers receive timely and effective housing advice and assistance, for example hospital discharge, prison discharge and potential eviction by Registered Providers
- Embark on joint training programme with key partners to bring other agencies up to date with current housing advice and homelessness legislation, policy and practice

Theme 3: Engage the Private Rented Sector

The private rented sector provides a key alternative to affordable housing, and a central role in the prevention of homelessness. Being asked to leave private rented sector accommodation is, however, nevertheless the second largest cause of homelessness. Our priorities in this area are: -

- Investigate introducing a programme of consultation, education and communication with private landlords and agents
- Investigate the introduction of a cash incentive to private landlords to offer longer tenancies to our customers
- Strengthen liaison with local letting agents and private landlords to prevent homelessness
- Monitor and review the impact of Local Housing Allowance on the private rented sector

Theme 4: Increase the supply of and maximise the use of existing affordable housing

Overcoming the demand and supply problems affecting the delivery of affordable homes in Reigate and Banstead is a significant challenge and will become more of a challenge with the introduction of changes to the funding and delivery of affordable housing introduced in 2011. Affordable housing is crucial to the borough if we are to adequately meet the housing needs of households unable to resolve problems for themselves. At the same time we recognise that maximising the use of existing affordable housing is a vital resource and must be used efficiently, as the demand for housing cannot be met through the development of more affordable housing alone.

Our key priorities are: -

- Enable new units of additional affordable housing
- Monitor Nominations Agreements with partner Registered Providers
- Review and ensure best use of Choice Based Lettings schemes
- Review and develop support and incentives available to under-occupiers to facilitate downsizing
- Develop processes to reduce the length of time households reside in temporary accommodation
- Develop a Tenancy Strategy that aims to make best use of existing and future affordable housing

Theme 5: Deliver Efficient Customer Focused Services

Delivering value for money is a constant challenge requiring consistent and regular monitoring. Our priorities here are: -

- Review our processes to ensure we are working effectively and efficiently
- Monitor and review customer satisfaction
- Regularly update the homepage of the Home Choice website to provide timely and useful information to customers
- Provide annual information to housing register applicants about social housing lettings during the previous year and future housing developments

The five themes are broken down into distinct actions within the Delivery Plan.

Reigate & Banstead Borough Council Homelessness Strategy Delivery Plan to 2015

The Delivery Plan defines the key objectives and the required tasks that will bring about success. It establishes what outcomes are anticipated and how these would be achieved. There are target timescales for each incorporated action, and lead officers and partners are identified.

Theme I: Develop the Housing Options Approach

Action	Outcome	Priority	Target Date	Lead Role	Partners	Resource Implications
Follow up Housing Options interviews in writing	All customers receive written details which clearly confirm the required actions of both the Council and the customer	1	2012	Housing Options Manager	None	Staff time
Staff are up to date with best practice, relevant legislation, Code of Guidance & case law	Training needs identified and staff trained accordingly Staff have all relevant skills and knowledge	1	On-going	Housing Options Manager	CIH Shelter Surrey LA's	Existing training budget
Maintain an effective working relationship with Housing Benefit Department	Regular liaison meetings, to include update of regulations, review of individual cases and continue the joint allocation of the DHP fund	1	On-going	Housing Options Manager	Benefits Manager	Staff time

Investigate opportunities to provide a supported housing scheme for young mothers	Supported housing scheme opened	1	2013	Housing Options Manager, Housing Development Manager	Local RP's	Staff time, Funding
Investigate ways to better support households at risk of repossession	Learn from best practice in other areas - Relevant staff trained in homelessness prevention techniques applicable to mortgage arrears cases	1	On-going	Housing Options Team	CAB Other Local Authorities	Existing Training budget Staff time
Make best use of mortgage rescue schemes	Use scheme for all suitable households	1	2012	Housing Options Manager	CAB Central Government	Central Government Funding, Staff time
Identify good practice in other areas in preventing homelessness resulting from family breakdown	New initiatives developed and introduced to reduce instances of homelessness caused by parent, other relative and friend eviction	2	2012	Housing Options Manager	Surrey Housing Needs Managers Group	Staff time

Work in partnership with Job Centre Plus to deliver advice on education, training and employment options	Housing Options Service deals holistically with people's needs Better off at work calculations and employment advice incorporated in Housing Options work	3	2012/13	Housing Options Manager	Trailblazers Department for Work and Pensions	Funding Staff time
Trailblazers	Minimum of 25 referrals first year, 36 second year. Minimum of 10 assisted into employment or training first year, 12 second year	Achieved	Project ends March 2012	Housing Options Manager	Trailblazers	Funding Staff time
Investigate opportunities for a rent deposit scheme for non-priority homeless households	Maintain low levels of rough sleeping	Achieved	Two rent deposit schemes set up in 2011	Housing Options Manager	YMCA NextStep HOPE 2450	Funded by CRISIS Funded by HOPE 2450 & donations
Attend Court with households at possession hearings	Less households approaching as homeless following court evictions	Achieved	Accommodation Sustainment Officer Employed 2011	Housing Options Manager		Government grant

Theme 2: Strengthen Partnership Working

Action	Outcome	Priority	Target Date	Lead Role	Partners	Resource Implications
Continue to implement working protocol with Police and Probation	Attend MAPPA, MARAC, PPO & DCIAG meetings regularly	1	On-going	Housing Options & Housing Register Manager	Police, Probation & SADAS	Staff time
Engage in joint training with key partners	RP's, Social Care, Youth Services, CMHT have a better understanding of roles and realistic expectations of partners	1	2012	Housing Options & Housing Register Manager	CMHT, Social Care Team, CAB, RP's	Staff time Training Budget
Where appropriate work in partnership and/or support voluntary sector projects	Successful housing initiatives and schemes	1	On-going	Housing Options Manager	Voluntary Sector	Staff time
Strengthen working relationships with prisons	Ensure clients are given timely advice to prevent homelessness	2	2012/13	Housing Options & Register Manager	Prisons, Probation, SADAS, Voluntary sector	Staff time
Strengthen working partnerships with hospitals	Develop an East Surrey discharge protocol	2	2012/13	Housing Options & Register Manager	Hospitals & PCT	Staff time

Theme 3: Engage the Private Rented Sector

Action	Outcome	Priority	Target Date	Lead Role	Partners	Resource Implications
Encourage private landlords to contact us first with available vacancies	Increased use of Rent Deposit Scheme	1	2012	YMCA NextStep, Housing Options Manager	Housing Options and Register Team, Private Landlords	Staff time, Resources, Funding
Proactively engage with tenants & landlords of failing tenancies	Negotiate and facilitate turning failing tenancies to successful tenancies through support and advice	1	On-going	Housing Options Manager, YMCA NextStep	CAB, Parashoot, Housing Benefit, Court, RP's	Staff time
Monitor the changes of Local Housing Allowance and Housing Benefit	Keep track of affected claims Monitor LHA rates and affordability	1	Ongoing	Housing Options Manager	Housing Benefit Team	Discretionary Housing Payments
Hold an annual private landlord forum	Improve relationships with local landlords and help make them aware of each others responsibilities and resources	2	On-going	Housing Options Manager	Letting Agents Housing Benefits Department YMCA NextStep	Staff time

Action	Outcome	Priority	Target Date	Lead Role	Partners	Resource Implications
Periodically visit all letting agents in the borough, and those outside of the borough who work with the Council's Rent Deposit Scheme	Good relationships fostered and maintained Mutual understanding and repeat business from landlords with available private rented sector properties	3	2012	YMCA NextStep	Housing Options Team, Local Letting Agents	Staff time
Investigate how a cash incentive scheme may encourage private landlords to offer longer tenancies (12 month initial AST agreements)	Greater security for households accessing private rented sector More families taking up private sector housing options Reduced average time spent in temporary accommodation	3	2012/13	Housing Options Manager	YMCA NextStep	Staff time and budget

Theme 4: Increase the supply of and maximise the use of existing affordable housing

Action	Outcome	Priority	Target Date	Lead Role	Partners	Resource Implications
Enable new units of affordable housing annually (see3.7)	Households accommodated new affordable homes – increased supply assists move-on from temporary and supported accommodation	1	Annually	Housing Development Manager	Development Management Officers RP Preferred Partners Housing & Communities Agency	Subject to sufficient sites and funding
Monitor Nominations Agreements	Ensure Council nominations to RP vacancies are in accordance with Nominations Agreements	1	2011 onwards	Housing Register Manager	Local RP's	Staff time
Review temporary accommodation nomination agreements	Temporary accommodation agreements with RPs to ensure compliance with current best practice and requirements.	1	2012	Housing Options Manager and Housing Development Manager	RP's	Staff time

Review under-occupation incentive schemes across the borough	Increase in the number of family size homes becoming available to meet demand. Free up overcrowded 1-bedroom accommodation to meet demand from single people/childless couples	1	2012	Housing Register Manager	Raven Housing Trust	Budget to encourage moves
Investigate measures to reduce length of time spent in temporary accommodation	All households placed in temporary accommodation must apply for permanent accommodation within the first 6 months	1	2012	Housing Options Manager	RP Temporary Accommodation Team	Staff time
Monitor all households in temporary accommodation to ensure they are managing their tenancies and applying for permanent housing	Minimise rent arrears and tenancy failure in order to create a positive platform for permanent housing	1	On-going	Housing Options Manager	RP Temporary accommodation providers	Staff time

Ensure CBL makes best use of existing housing stock	Annual review of banding system to ensure it is balanced & provides adequate measure of priority - homeless households, under-occupiers and those residing in overcrowded conditions	1	Annual	Housing Register Manager	RP Allocations Officers	Staff time
Identify and implement improvements to enable vulnerable groups to access CBL groups	Vulnerable groups assisted to enjoy equal access to available properties	2	On-going	Housing Register Manager	Partner RPs, Partner Local Authorities	Consultation costs Staff time
Encourage change of use for low demand accommodation	Scheme, partners and client group identified	3	2012/13	Housing Options Manager	Raven Housing Trust and other RPs	Staff time
Develop an East Surrey strategy for dealing with Empty Homes	Subject to resources increase available accommodation provision in the borough by making best use of all available stock	3	2014	Housing Development Officer	Private Landlords	Financial Resources, Staff time

Theme 5: Deliver Efficient Customer Focused Services

Action	Outcome	Priority	Target Date	Lead Role	Partners	Resource Implications
Continue to review our processes	Eliminate duplication of effort and inefficient working practices	1	On-going	Housing Options Manager/Housing Register Manager	Surrey Housing Needs Managers	Staff time
Monitor Customer Satisfaction	Understand our customers' experience of our services and whether initiatives are meeting needs and aspirations. Use of customer satisfaction cards, investigation and introduction of other methods to aid understanding.	1	On-going	Housing Options Manager/Housing Register Manager	Customers including Partner Organisations	Staff time and printing budget
Improve information exchanges with customers	Provide each housing advice customer with a written record of the advice given at each interview.	1	2012	Housing Options Manager	None	Staff time
Publish an annual review of the Strategy	Brief update report published each year – clear, concise and transparent report of progress	1	Annual	Housing Options Manager	Internal and external partners	Staff time

Improve the Home Choice Website	Web site tailored to the needs of the borough's Housing department and updated regularly	1	On-going	Housing Register Manager	None	Staff time
Provide annual housing information to Housing Register applicants	Write an annual newsletter to Housing Register applicants providing updates on bid outcomes, numbers housed, new developments, the allocations scheme	1	Annual	Housing Register Manager	None	Staff time and printing budget
Arrange annual inter-agency training sessions for partners on housing issues	Partner agencies develop understanding of housing and homelessness issues, legislation and practice.	2	2013	Housing Options Manager/Housing Register Manager	None	Staff time

3. Resources to Deliver the Strategy

We have a number of resources available to us to tackle homelessness, and the Council recognises that to successfully implement the Delivery Plan we will need to consider what other resources we can access. The resources available now are:

3.1 General funding from Council

The day to day operations of the Housing Service are funded by Council budgets. In terms of housing options and register services this budget funds three full time Housing Options staff, a Housing Options Manager, three full-time and one part time Housing Register Officer, and a Housing Register Manager.

3.2 CLG funding through Homelessness Grant

The Council receives a Homelessness Grant. This funding is used for a variety of projects, including a fixed term contract Accommodation Sustainment Officer and YMCA NextStep.

3.3 Repossession Prevention Fund

Councils received a Repossession Prevention Fund – Evictions and Repossessions contributions from government in 2009/10, of which the Council received a one off payment of £47,500. The fund is intended to be used by councils to provide assistance, in the form of loans or occasionally grants, to households at risk of repossession by a social housing provider, private landlord or mortgage lender. This complements the Mortgage Rescue Scheme. There is no expectation that this funding will be repeated in future years.

3.4 Trailblazers Funding

The five Trailblazer authorities (Elmbridge BC, Epsom & Ewell BC, Mole Valley DC, Tandridge DC and the Council) received £240,000 government funding to implement a Trailblazers pilot programme offering employment and training advice to those seeking housing advice. The authorities have each contributed £10,000 towards the project.

3.5 Planning contributions

The Council sometimes receives financial contributions from developers in lieu of providing on-site affordable housing on developments. This funding is used to supplement the costs of delivering affordable housing on schemes that would otherwise not proceed, or on schemes of a special nature e.g. temporary accommodation. Current commitments include the remodelling and extension of one of the schemes that the Council uses for temporary accommodation.

3.6 Supporting People Grant

Many supported housing providers and support providers receive grant funding to provide support to prevent homelessness through the Supporting People fund. Up to 2010/11 this budget, managed by Surrey County Council, was ring-fenced for supported housing only. From 2010/11 this grant will be paid to the County Council as part of the Area Based Grant, however, in the immediate future this is likely to be ring-fenced for supporting people contracts.

Notwithstanding the ring-fencing issue, the 2011/12 Supporting People budget for Surrey has been reduced significantly. This will have a detrimental effect on people requiring support to access or maintain accommodation, for example the budget of providing floating support in east Surrey is being reduced by about 65%.

3.7 Discretionary Housing Payments

Councils receive an amount of money from the government each year to use on a discretionary basis for those already in receipt of Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit that need more help to pay their housing costs. This fund is a limited amount and once used all Discretionary Housing Payments will stop. The Council can exceed the government limit but would have to fund anything over the limit from Council funds. Each application is assessed on its own merits.

4. Monitoring

Our progress will be monitored via regular meetings with the Housing Portfolio Holder, the completion of quarterly statistical returns to the Department of Communities and Local Government and through ongoing dialogue with partners and service users.

The Council will conduct a formal review of the Homelessness Strategy in 2016.

5. The Review

The purpose of the Homelessness Review is to take stock of how the Council's Housing Options and Homelessness functions have been performing since publication of the last review in 2003. It also explains how the service has changed and developed over the years to respond to the government's agenda to prevent homelessness. It highlights changes in our approach to homelessness, new initiatives and the increasing importance of partnership working.

In recent years Reigate & Banstead Borough Council has radically changed its approach to tackling homelessness, with positive results. The service has shifted its focus from simply reacting to homelessness to taking a proactive homelessness prevention approach. As a result since 2004 the number of statutory homelessness acceptances has significantly decreased.

A variety of homelessness prevention initiatives, new ways of working and partnership work have contributed to the reduction in homelessness acceptances. As homelessness acceptances have decreased, the service's casework and housing options work has increased dramatically. The issue of homelessness has not gone away, but the success of the service in preventing cases using a variety of tools has improved.

In 2007 the Housing Options team became one of two authorities named as 'Homelessness Champions' in the South East. This role recognised the innovative and effective good work undertaken by the Housing Options team to prevent homelessness. Through this role, the Council has shared its experiences and best practice with other housing authorities.

The current economic downturn is placing increasing pressure on households and private landlords struggling to stay in housing. The affordability of housing continues to be an issue in the borough, despite the building of affordable housing units planned in the coming years and the fall in house prices. The Council remains committed to working in partnership with Registered Providers (RPs) and other organisations to prevent homelessness and increase the availability of other housing options.

6. Policy and Legal Framework

The Homelessness Strategy should be viewed in the context of its links with the legislative framework and with other strategies and plans at local, county, regional and national level. It cannot succeed in isolation and it has been developed with reference to a range of other corporate strategies and plans. These are summarised below.

6.1 Legislation and National Policy

The Homelessness Act 2002 placed new duties on local authorities to carry out reviews and to publish strategies to tackle and prevent homelessness in their area.

The Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) 2005 strategy for tackling homelessness, *Sustainable Communities: Settled Homes, Changing Lives*, identifies five key areas in tackling homelessness issues:

- Preventing homelessness
- Providing support for vulnerable people
- Tackling the wider causes and symptoms of homelessness
- Sustaining reductions in rough sleeping
- Providing more settled homes

It also sets out the government's aim to halve the number of households living in insecure temporary accommodation by 2010.

The *Sustainable Communities: Homes for All* 2005 sets out the next phase in delivering the Sustainable Communities Plan. Covering five years, the key objectives are to offer everyone the opportunity of a decent home at a price they can afford, promoting choice, fairness and the opportunity to own or rent a good quality home that meets their needs.

The *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities* 2006 provides statutory guidance on local authorities' housing and social services statutory functions in respect of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

In 2006 the government launched the National Youth Homelessness Scheme. The aim of the scheme is to tackle and prevent youth homelessness. In May 2008 the CLG and Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) published guidance on joint working: *Joint working Between Housing and Children's Services: Preventing Homelessness and tackling its effects on children and young people*.

The 2006 Housing Corporation strategy *Tackling Homelessness* set out what it expected housing associations to do in contributing to the prevention and tackling of homelessness. Commitments include working with local authorities, prevention

of homelessness and tenancy sustainment, better use of housing stock and the promotion of mixed sustainable communities.

The Hills Review *Ends & Means: The Future Roles of Social Housing in England* 2007 considers the role of social housing in creating genuinely mixed communities, asking whether social housing can encourage social mobility (including labour market mobility) and be more responsive to changing needs and greater geographical mobility.

The *Local Decisions: A Fairer Future for Social Housing* (CLG 2010) consultation included proposals to end lifetime tenancies, allow more flexibility in criteria for waiting lists, and the introduction of a new 'Affordable Rent' tenure.

Following the above consultation, the national housing strategy *Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England* was published in 2011. This strategy, supported by the provisions of the Localism Act 2011, paves the way for significant reform of social housing, increasing the flexibility for local authorities to determine their own housing priorities at the local level, promoting access to homeownership and introducing new measures to reinvigorate the housing market.

The Localism Act 2011 requires local authorities to publish a Tenancy Strategy outlining their policies on type and length of tenancy and other issues relating to the changes introduced by the government under the Act including changes to homelessness legislation.

The *2011-15 Affordable Homes Programme* published in early 2011 changed the way organisations could bid for grants to provide new affordable housing, and was established on the basis that providers raise more funding themselves - including charging rents up to 80% of market rent.

The Welfare Reform Bill 2011 sets out the introduction of Universal Credit, reforms to Disability Living Allowance, Housing Benefit and Employment and Support Allowance. It also gives Local Authorities greater powers to drive out abuse of the welfare system.

6.2 Regional Policy Framework

The *Surrey Supporting People Strategy 2008-11* sets out the commitment for supporting vulnerable people across Surrey in need of housing support. The main aim of the strategy is to ensure that the more vulnerable members of the community have opportunities to make positive choices and to positively contribute to the communities in which they live. Amongst the five priority groups are those at risk of domestic violence, young people and care leavers, and people with multiple and complex needs (often at risk of homelessness).

Surrey's *Interim Community Strategy 2008 : Delivering the Vision for Surrey in 2020* describes how a wide range of organisations including local districts and boroughs and Surrey County Council will work together to make Surrey a county of "distinctive, confident, caring, creative and safe communities, where individuals and organisations have taken responsibility for resolving the many challenges that the county faces".

The Surrey Strategic Partnership's *Local Area Agreement* (LAA) set out the priorities for Surrey. The LAA was an agreement between central and local government to deliver a balance of national priorities together with the priorities of local people. Housing targets included an aim to deliver 2,375 new affordable homes in Surrey 2008-09 to 2010-11 and supporting vulnerable people to achieve independence.

Surrey County Council in partnership with the eleven district councils has published a *Joint Accommodation Strategy for people with care and support needs in Surrey 2010-2014*. This strategy focuses on housing issues for people with care and support needs.

6.3 Local Policy Framework

The *East Surrey Housing Strategy 2009-13* is prepared in alignment with the key priorities and objectives of the Borough Community Plan, the Council's Corporate Plan and Local Development Framework. The development of new housing in sustainable mixed communities is identified as an objective in each of these documents.

The East Surrey Housing Strategy identifies the need to provide housing options as a priority. Homelessness prevention, extending choice and building new homes are key priorities.

The Council has published a number of other strategies and plans that have influenced the priorities in this Homelessness Strategy. These include the Eastern Surrey Extra Care Strategy, and the Community Safety Strategy.

The Council's *Corporate Plan 2011-15* highlights the "Tackling and preventing homelessness" and "Promoting the provision of affordable housing for local residents" as two of its Key Service Priorities.

7. Progress on Homelessness Prevention since 2003

Since publication of the last Homelessness Review in 2003, the number of households accepted by the Council as unintentionally homeless and in priority need has reduced significantly. In 2004/05 the Council accepted 206 homeless households; this contrasts with the acceptance of twelve cases in 2009/10 and 22 in 2010/11.

This change is a result of a combination of changes to the way the Housing Options team manages households threatened with homelessness, the introduction of homelessness prevention initiatives and partnership working. This section looks at the types of households approaching the Council for housing advice, explores the main reasons households are threatened with homelessness and the outcomes of these cases. The Council has a duty to provide advice and assistance to all non statutory homeless households as well as house those to whom we owe a statutory duty.

Most households approaching the Housing service are seeking housing advice and information. At the time of writing the Council receives up to 200 enquiries a month. The Council also receives enquiries from private landlords about their rights and responsibilities, as well as from support agencies, voluntary and community groups. Timely advice work is crucial to the success of the Council in preventing homelessness.

7.1 Changes in National Priorities

Housing need has been high on the national agenda in recent years. Since the publication of the Council's first Homelessness Review and Strategy a number of government targets and initiatives have been set on reducing homelessness, changes to standards of temporary accommodation, housing options approaches, dealing with 16 and 17 year olds, the introduction of choice based lettings and links between homelessness and worklessness.

The key initiatives that have influenced changes in the Council's approach to tackling homelessness are:

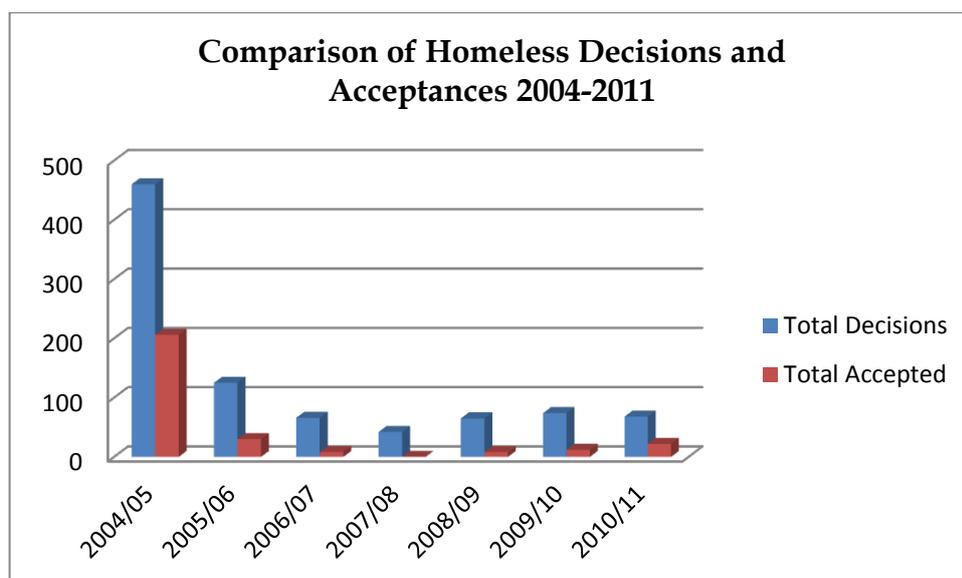
- Ending the use of bed and breakfast accommodation for households with dependent children for more than six weeks
- Halving the use of temporary accommodation for households to whom the Council has accepted a re-housing duty by 2010
- Improving the standards of temporary accommodation to provide private kitchen and bathroom facilities
- No 16/17 year olds placed in bed and breakfast accommodation except in an emergency and then for no more than 6 weeks

7.2 Trends in Homelessness

This section explores the number of homeless applications investigated during 2004-2011, the number and types of household for whom the Council accepted a responsibility, homelessness approaches by ethnicity and the main causes of homelessness.

7.2.1 Homelessness Applications

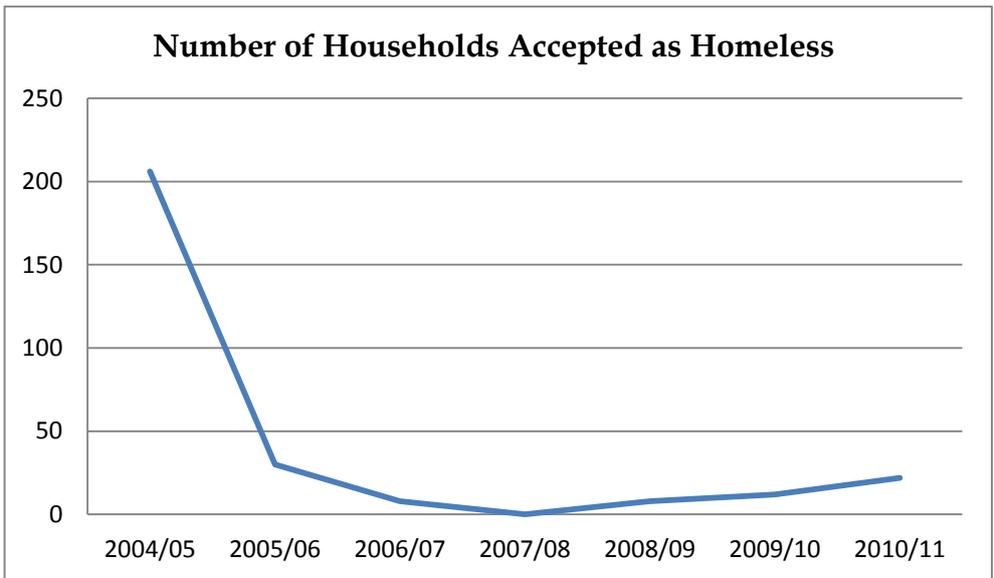
Between 2004/5 and 2010/11 the Council investigated 900 homelessness applications. As the graph below shows, the number is not spread evenly over this period; the majority of applications were taken in 2004/05.



Source: PIE

The number of homelessness applications investigated and decisions made reduced significantly in 2005/06. This reflects the Housing Options team's shift in focus from a reactive service to a preventive one. This trend has continued with a very small number of applications from 2006 onwards and few acceptances of households found to be unintentionally homeless and in priority need.

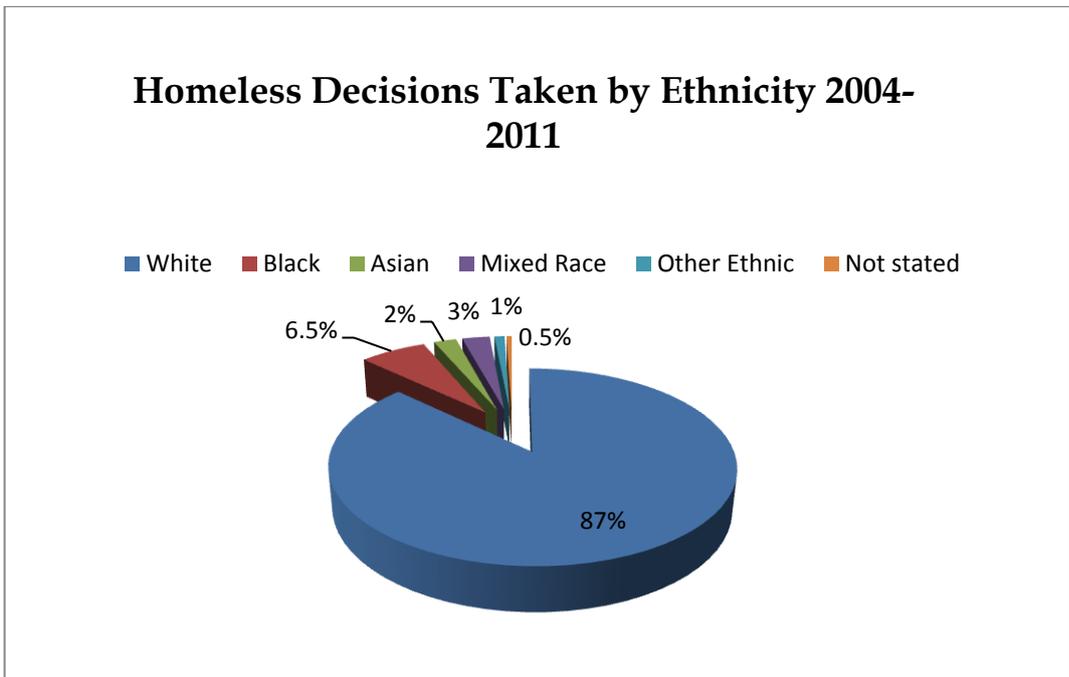
Our preventive approach continues to ensure that housing problems are preempted and dealt with before the crisis of homelessness for many households. However, as a result of the economic downturn a rise in homeless applications and acceptances since 2008 has been inevitable. This trend is reflected nationally. Without this preventive work the homeless acceptance figures would dramatically increase to levels higher than in 2004/05.



Source: PIE

7.2.2 Homelessness and Ethnicity

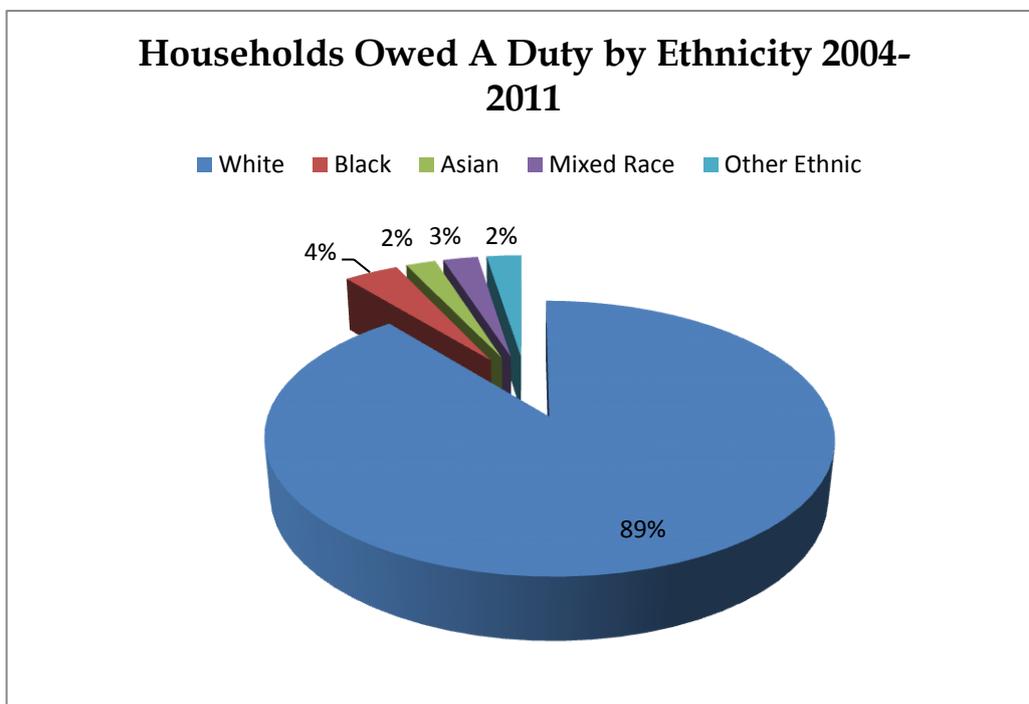
The Council monitors the ethnicity of all households that approach us for housing advice or as homeless households.



Source: PIE

According to the Census 2001 95% of the borough population is White (White, White Irish, White Other), 1% Black, 2% Asian, 1% Mixed, and 1% Other Ethnic. When compared to the percentage of homeless applications taken from different ethnic groups, non-white applicants are slightly over represented compared to the proportion of ethnic minority households in the borough.

The chart below shows the breakdown by ethnicity of households accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need by the Council as a percentage of the 288 households accepted 2004 - 2011. There is a slightly greater representation of accepted homeless households from minority ethnic groups in comparison to the Census 2001. This difference may be a reflection of changes in the ethnic structure of the borough population since the 2001 Census was conducted.



Source: PIE

7.2.3 Causes of Homelessness

Households become threatened with homelessness or are made homeless for a variety of reasons. During 2004/05 the main cause was that parents were no longer willing to accommodate, closely followed by other relative or friend evicting the household. This mirrored the trend in the previous Homelessness Strategy.

The picture from 2005 onwards is more mixed, and as a result of the significant reduction of the number of households to whom the Council accepted a duty it is difficult to identify obvious trends. The significant reduction in homelessness acceptances directly correlates with the implementation of the Housing Options approach to homelessness. This approach introduced a number of initiatives aimed at tackling the main causes of homelessness. Key initiatives include homelessness advice, the use of mediation to help resolve family difficulties, the highly successful 'Schools Project' in which Housing Options staff discuss housing issues with Year 11 students as part of the Personal, Social Education syllabus and the introduction of choice based lettings.

The table below shows causes of homelessness for those households accepted as homeless during the last six years.

Main Reasons for Homeless Acceptances

Year	Parental Eviction	Friend/Relative/ Eviction	Non-Violent Relationship Breakdown	Violent Relationship breakdown	Other Violence	Mortgage Arrears	Public or Private Sector Rent Arrears	Loss of Tied Accommodation	Other loss of AST	Left institution/LA Care/Forces/Other	Emergency / Other
2004/05	67	39	9	29	2	2	2	3	34	10	9
2005/06	4	4	3	6	0	2	1	0	3	4	3
2006/07	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
2007/08	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2008/09	1	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	1	1
2009/10	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	3	1	3
2010/11	3	1	1	4	0	0	1	0	5	1	6

Source: PIE

Of those households to whom the Council accepts a homelessness duty, the majority are households with dependent children and households containing a pregnancy. This very much reflects the trend shown in the previous Homelessness Review and Strategy and has continued, even accounting for the sharp reduction in homeless acceptances.

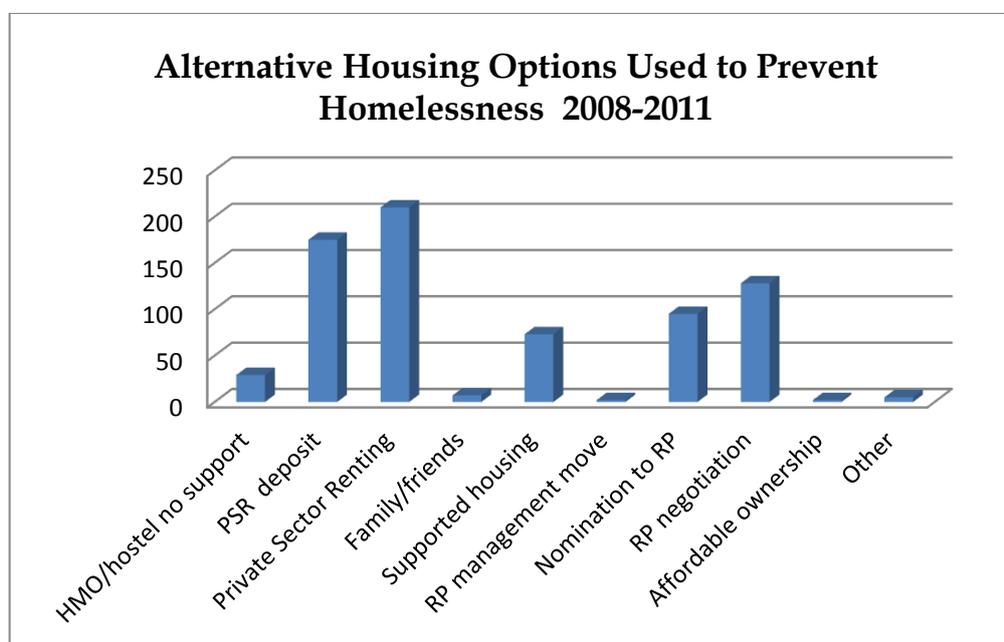
Homelessness acceptances by household type

	Emergency	Households with Children	Pregnancy	Young People	Care Leavers	Old Age	Physical Disability	Mental illness or disability	Other reasons	Domestic or other violence	Ex-offender	Total
2004/05	0	98	35	14	2	8	14	30	2	2	1	206
2005/06	0	10	3	1	1	1	5	8	1	0	0	30
2006/07	0	3	0	0	2	0	2	1	0	0	0	8
2007/08	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2008/09	0	4	1	1	0	1	0	0	2	0	1	10
2009/10	0	6	2	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	12
2010/11	0	15	1	0	2	0	2	2	0	0	0	22

Source: PIE

7.3 Homeless Prevention

Preventing homelessness is our most important work. Between 2008 and 2011 over 700 households, many of which were non statutory homeless households, were prevented from becoming homeless. The Council provided advice and assistance to help them find and secure alternative accommodation avoiding the need for a homeless application. Most of these households were assisted by the Housing Options Team and the most frequently used option was the use of the private rented sector (graph below). Qualifying households were assisted through the rent deposit scheme YMCA NextStep; others were provided with advice and information to find their own private rented accommodation. The third most used alternative option to prevent homelessness was ‘negotiation with Registered Providers’, chiefly this is accommodation offered to households by Registered Providers on the basis of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy. This provides the same security of tenure as that found in the private rented sector.



Source: PIE

From 2009/10 the Council started to record those households that through housing options work, although facing the threat of homelessness, were able to remain in their current accommodation. For the years 2009/10 to 2010/11 nearly 100 households were able to keep their accommodation following the Council's intervention. Typical casework involved resolving housing benefit issues, negotiating with landlords and financial inclusion / debt advice.

7.4 Affordability

The housing market has been experiencing a turbulent time nationally. At a local level, house prices declined dramatically during 2008/09 but have since steadily risen. A comparison of house prices in Surrey between 2007 and 2011 shows an overall rise of 3.1%. The county continues to be a high-price area, with flats/maisonettes selling at £188,050 and terraced houses selling at £240,976 on average in April 2011¹.

In reality, many households, particularly first time buyers purchase the cheapest homes available known as entry level homes. Within the borough in April 2011, entry sales levels were around £120,000 for a one bed flat rising to £165,000 for a 2 bed flat and starting at around £175,000 for a two bed terrace and £200,000 for a three bed terrace². The household income needed to purchase these homes varies depending on the level of deposit required by lenders. Increasingly lenders are requiring deposits of between 20 and 30%³. The higher level of deposit presents a problem to many lower income households. The household income required to purchase a 1 bed flat at 75% and 3 times income is around £32,000 rising to £52,000 for a 2 bed terrace.

Private renting is less expensive than buying a home, although the cost is still high. The cheapest 1 and 2 bed properties in the borough require an income of around £22,000. For lower income households this cost is mitigated by qualification for housing benefit paid via the local housing allowance.

According to the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2010, the median household income in the borough was £24,901 and the mean household income was £32,250. Clearly, purchasing even the cheapest homes is beyond the means of lower income households. The private rented sector offers a housing option, but social housing, with the security of tenure it offers, is the preferred option for many households on moderate to low incomes.

7.5 Use of Temporary Accommodation

As the number of households accepted as homeless has decreased so has the Council's use of bed and breakfast (B&B) accommodation. As an exception it may be used whilst a homeless application is being investigated. The Council met its target to end the use of B&B for families with children in 2007. Since this time there have been no families with children in B&B accommodation for longer than six weeks.

The Council has continued to use temporary accommodation for households where we have been unable to prevent homelessness and the Council owes a re-housing duty. These households are accommodated in temporary accommodation pending an offer of permanent accommodation through choice based lettings.

¹ Land Registry

² Rightmove website, April 2011

³ Council for Mortgage Lenders

Although the number of households accepted as homeless has generally been low, since 2005/06 the Council has continued to use temporary accommodation to assist a number of households threatened with homelessness as a preventive measure. Use of temporary accommodation in this way enables the Housing Options team to provide a more managed housing options service.

All temporary accommodation in the borough is owned and managed by Registered Providers. Since 2005/06 the Council has been working with Registered Providers to reduce numbers of units from 180 to fewer than 90 to meet the government target to halve the number of temporary accommodation units. At the same time improvements are being made to the remaining accommodation so that units are self-contained with private kitchen and bathroom facilities.

Raven Housing Trust has completed refurbishment works to two temporary accommodation centres and is considering plans to refurbish another. In 2007/08 Wickham House in Reigate was refurbished and extended to provide 17 self contained temporary accommodation flats. The Council contributed £1million towards the cost of the scheme. Wickham House provides high quality temporary accommodation to prevent homelessness amongst affected households. In 2010/11 Coniston Court was refurbished and extended to provide a mix of nine one and two bed self contained temporary flats and houses in Horley.

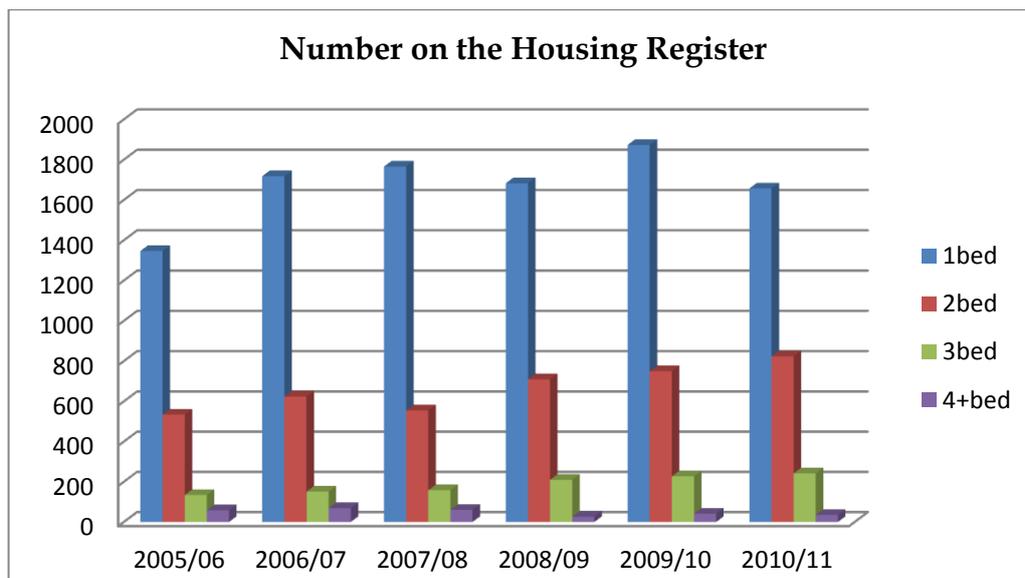
The Council met the government target to halve the number of households in temporary accommodation by 2010 early. However, the subsequent refurbishment of Coniston Court has slightly increased the number of temporary accommodation units available in the borough.

7.6 Choice Based Lettings in Reigate & Banstead

In 2006 the Council changed the way it prioritised households on the housing register. Following consultation, the housing register points system for assessing housing need was replaced with a banding system. All housing register applicants are placed in band A-E, plus band K. Band A applicants have the most significant housing need, band E the least and key workers are placed in band A-E according to need plus band K for key worker properties. Households to whom the Council has accepted a re-housing duty are placed in band B of the housing register, along with other applicants in high housing need.

The number of households on the housing register has been increasing steadily over a number of years. In 2004 there were 1,751 households on the Council's housing register. This increased by more than one thousand households to 2,758 as at April 2011. There are a number of reasons for this increase. Affordability is a problem for many households on low or moderate incomes, who are unable to enter owner occupation and find the local private rental market expensive. Furthermore, since launching choice based lettings, the Council has undertaken more advertising; this has generated more interest in housing waiting lists. The graph below shows the

increase in numbers of households on the housing register over the last 7 years and the number of households seeking different property sizes.



Source: Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix 2005-2011

The Council began operating choice based lettings in 2007. Initially the scheme was restricted to a few bands; the Council then extended Home Choice to all applicants in 2007/8. Home Choice requires all housing register applicants to take an active role in applying for available homes. Each week, homes are advertised and applicants are able to apply for the homes in which they are interested and that meet their housing need.

In the past, the Council made direct offers of accommodation to homeless households living in temporary accommodation; however Home Choice has transferred this responsibility to applicants. Homeless households bidding for properties that have been prioritised for band B applicants now bid alongside other high need band B applicants.

7.7 Sub-Regional Choice Based Lettings

In 2006 Reigate & Banstead, Epsom & Ewell, Mole Valley and Tandridge Council made a joint bid to the Department for Communities and Local Government for a share of a grant to develop a 'sub regional' choice based lettings scheme. Our bid was successful and in December of 2006 the award was made. The four councils also contributed financially to the development of the scheme.

The purpose of East Surrey HomeChoice is to enable housing and transfer applicants to move within the East Surrey area. It provides opportunities to households that may need to move for employment, support, to be close to family or social networks or simply to meet their housing need.

The scheme went 'live' in 2008, the four councils agreed to let at least 10% of available social housing properties through the scheme. Any eligible applicant registered on any of the four authorities' housing registers can bid for a property.

The four councils have agreed an allocations policy based on a banding system and the project will be monitored by a group of officers from the four authorities.

7.8 Provision of Affordable Housing

New affordable housing is one option to help meet housing need in the borough. The Council's Corporate Plan 2011-15 and the East Surrey Housing Strategy 2009-2013 highlight the need to provide affordable housing and to take steps to increase the supply over the coming years.

In 2007 the Council, in partnership with four other local authorities in East Surrey, commissioned a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA), which included an updated housing needs survey. The SHMA was published in 2008. It calculates an annual affordable housing need in the borough of 970 homes, which, after deducting supply through relets and new affordable homes, results in an annual shortfall of approximately 523 units.

The Council seeks to provide affordable housing through partnership working with Registered Providers, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and through using its planning policies to require affordable housing. From 2006/7 to 2010/11 853 affordable homes were provided in the borough across a range of tenures.

The Council is taking a number of steps to increase the supply of affordable housing through the planning process.

The *Local Plan 2005* contains policies requiring the provision of 25% affordable housing on sites of 25 units or more. In April 2007, the Council adopted a threshold of 15 units based on the national indicative threshold in Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3). This policy will be replaced by a new policy and target in the evolving Core Strategy Document. When adopted, the Core Strategy Development Plan Document is likely to require 30% affordable housing on sites of 15 units or more and the payment of a financial contribution towards the development of affordable housing elsewhere in the borough for most sites below 15 units. Given recent changes in the funding for the provision of development of affordable housing, the predicted number of new affordable housing units will continue to fall short of demand.

8. Development of the Housing Options Approach

This section explores how Housing Services has responded to the national homelessness prevention agenda. It looks at the range of ongoing initiatives employed since 2006 to deliver a joined up housing options approach to preventing homelessness. Many of these initiatives are based on partnerships with other agencies. They aim to reach a variety of groups including young people, families and hard to reach groups such as drug and alcohol users.

8.1 Housing Advice Surgeries

The Housing Options team began holding housing advice surgeries within the Council Help Shops in Banstead, Redhill, Merstham and Horley a few years ago. The purpose of these surgeries was to bring housing advice to our customers by way of appointments and a 'drop in service' to local residents. This service was provided on a monthly basis but is now provided as need arises due to low service take up.

8.2 YMCA NextStep

In April 2003 the Council worked in partnership with YMCA NextStep to extend their existing rent deposit scheme which assisted single 16-30 olds. It now includes other types of households with a housing need. The scheme can be accessed following a referral from the Council.

NextStep provide a rent deposit guarantee in place of a cash deposit. Once accommodation has been found, potential tenants are vetted for support requirements before a tenancy is set up. Clients are provided with a support service for minimum period of 6 months. NextStep staff liaise with other agencies and professionals as necessary in order to ensure that any support requirements are met to enable a successful tenancy.

Since the start over 240 landlords and several letting agents have worked in partnership with NextStep. Since April 2003 they have assisted with the placing of 442 applicants and their families.

NextStep is a member of the Private Rented Sector Officers forum. This forum meets every three months to discuss good practice, any issues affecting the private rented sector and rent deposit schemes. The group is attended by Housing Options staff from most Surrey areas.

8.3 Schools project

For the past six years Housing Options Officers have been visiting schools and delivering lessons on housing as part of the Personal Social Health and Education (PSHE) syllabus. The lessons provide interactive advice and information, including exercises on developing budgeting skills, as well as discussion about which housing options are realistically available for young people in the borough. The aim is to encourage young people to remain at home until they have the financial and life skills to find and maintain a tenancy in the private sector. The Housing Options service has received positive feedback from pupils and school staff.

8.4 Reigate & Redhill YMCA - Hillbrook House

In 2004 work was completed on YMCA Hillbrook House, a 42 bed supported housing scheme owned and managed by the YMCA providing accommodation for young people between the ages of 16 - 30.

Hillbrook House combines access to safe and affordable accommodation with in-house support staff. Each young person has a dedicated key worker who will assist them in writing up, following and developing their support plan. The support plan takes a holistic approach and where appropriate Hillbrook House brings in the services of external agencies to assist. Hillbrook House is well placed to do this, providing office and communal space which helps to facilitate inter-agency working. In-house support includes NextStep, Heads Together counselling (run by the YMCA) the Mindful Mental Health Service (run by Surrey Health), Steps Ahead personal development training and education (run by the Surrey Care Trust). Hillbrook House also utilises other off-site Reigate and Redhill YMCA Services e.g. Youth Services, Sport Health and Fitness.

Hillbrook House can house young people for up to two years, during which time they are prepared for independent living and assisted whenever possible to move on. Since opening, Hillbrook House has helped over 130 young people achieve this.

8.5 Joint Supported Housing Panel

Reigate & Banstead Borough Council, Tandridge District Council and Mole Valley District Council work in partnership to sign post those with a housing and support need to appropriate supported housing.

To facilitate this, a Joint Supported Housing Panel has been developed. All appropriate cases are referred to the panel for assessment of need, allocation of any available vacancies and the recording of unmet housing need. This information helps to inform future housing development.

The Joint Supported Housing Panel comprises of representatives from a cross-section of statutory care support agencies, the three council housing departments and supported housing providers. The panel is chaired by an appropriate council housing representative.

The client groups considered under this process are as follows:

- Learning disability
- Sensory impairment
- Physical disability
- Substance misuse
- Mental health
- Ex-offenders

All clients are expected to have a local connection with Reigate and Banstead, Tandridge or Mole Valley. They must either live in the area or have close relatives living in the area, for example parents or adult brothers or sisters.

All referrals to the panel are made by the client's Care Co-ordinator, who presents the case to the panel at the monthly meeting. If the client does not have one, then the council's Housing Needs section may make a referral, although the client must be aware of the referral and sign the form. Clients cannot self-refer or attend the panel.

Referrers present a brief summary of the case to assist the panel in assessing the type of housing required. The panel's recommendation is sent to the appropriate council which holds full details of the housing application. A letter is then sent to the referrer explaining the panel's recommendations. Referrers then advise their client of the outcome.

If there are any supported housing vacancies available at the time of the panel meeting, these are discussed and the panel may recommend a nomination based on current cases held. However, until the panel has had time to consider all the current cases, the final nomination for the vacancy may be left with the appropriate council Housing Needs section.

8.6 Housing Benefit

A strong working relationship between the two services has benefited a number of the households being advised by the Housing Options service. This has been especially relevant since the introduction of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA). Joint work has included joint administration of the Discretionary Housing Payment budget. This has enabled the Council to prevent homelessness for a number of households by helping them to privately rent homes that they would have been unable to afford without assistance in the form of Discretionary Housing Payments.

8.7 Offenders

In 2007/8 all Surrey local authorities signed up to the Offenders Protocol in conjunction with Probation and the Police. This offender's protocol was launched via a number of agency stakeholder days. Whilst there is no obligation on a council to give any extra regard or resources to an offender, Reigate & Banstead Borough Council has worked closely with Probation, the Prolific and Priority Offender (PPO) team and the Multi-Agency Public Protection Agency team (MAPPA) in conjunction with the Council's Community Safety Officer. Where a PPO or MAPPA individual is willing to engage with the Police and Council, the Council can offer assistance to access private rented accommodation. The Council has assisted a number with either short term accommodation until they entered supported housing or private rented accommodation. This has helped those individuals become part of a local community and make positive decisions and changes to their lives. We also run housing workshops when requested, for those on Probation that have housing issues.

8.8 Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Committee (MARAC)

In 2007/8 the nationwide scheme of MARACs was implemented. The Housing team liaises with the committee on a monthly basis to look at how the Council can help to prevent homelessness amongst victims of domestic abuse.

8.9 East Surrey Sanctuary Scheme

The Council is a member of the Sanctuary Scheme. It provides additional security to victims of domestic abuse to remain in their own homes where they wish and it is appropriate for them to do so. The scheme operates in conjunction with Surrey Police, the East Surrey Domestic Violence Forum, Mole Valley District Council and Tandridge District Council.

8.10 Salvation Army HOPE2540

In 2009 at the request of the Council a homeless 'drop in' was opened at the Salvation Army Hall in Redhill. This is staffed by volunteers from local churches. They offer an advocacy service, hot meals and food parcels for the homeless and disadvantaged, a job club (and a youth club).

In December 2010, HOPE 2540 launched a rent in advance and deposit bond scheme for the disadvantaged that are unable to be assisted by the local authority. The scheme matches suitable tenants with suitable landlords. All tenants are vetted and HOPE2540 take care of any support needs that may become apparent in order to facilitate a successful tenancy.

In December 2011, HOPE2540 launched a six week pilot floating Winter Night Shelter. Local authorities are under an obligation to house the street homeless when winter temperature drops below a certain level. The shelter is run by volunteers and switches between different church locations within the borough each night. Referrals are made by agencies during the day or by the police outside office hours. It is hoped, following the success of the pilot, that the shelter can run for a twelve week period in future years. The shelter has capacity for 10-12 people each night. Housing staff support these projects giving advice and assistance to both volunteers and project users.

8.11 Drug, Community, Incident Action Group (DCIAG)

A representative from the housing options team attends the monthly DCIAG meeting. The group discusses individuals that come to the regular notice of the police, drug or alcohol agencies. These individuals often have chaotic lifestyles and housing issues which the Council is able to pick up on at an early stage and begin homelessness prevention work with those affected.

8.12 Registered Providers

Since 2007/8 all Registered Providers that have housing stock in the borough have agreed to inform the Housing Options Service when they serve notice and apply to the court for possession for the eviction of any of their tenants. Again, this enables early intervention with our work on homelessness prevention.

All of the Registered Providers with housing stock in the borough participate in the Home Choice scheme. Many of them advertise all available homes through the scheme and existing tenants that wish to transfer to another property are eligible to join the housing register.

Raven Housing Trust tenants (the largest stock owner in the borough) have always been able to join the Council's register, and up to 2009 Raven Housing Trust continued to manage its own transfer list. This meant it retained 25% of vacant homes for allocation to its own transfer list. In 2009, Raven agreed to outsource the transfer list to the Council. This means all housing applicants wishing to transfer are able to fully participate in the Council's choice based lettings scheme.

8.13 The Localism Act 2011

The Localism Act 2011 sets out the government's intention to legislate to give local authorities greater flexibility in bringing their homelessness duty to an end with offers of accommodation in the private rented sector, without the applicant's agreement. This will give the Council more flexibility in discharging the homeless duty and we propose to use the private sector whenever possible. However, we are currently awaiting detailed government guidance expected in the summer of 2012.

8.14 Young people and care leavers protocols

In 2005 all Surrey local authorities signed up to a care leaver's protocol in conjunction with Children Services. This protocol ensures the smooth housing transition of young people leaving care and has ended the practice of care leavers facing homelessness.

In 2009 all Surrey local authorities signed up to a protocol for homeless 16/17 year olds again in conjunction with Children's Services. This protocol ensures that, in the event of a young person becoming homeless, there is joint working to facilitate them returning home or otherwise finding suitable alternative accommodation. This protocol was revised and updated in 2011.

In February 2011 the first East Surrey 'homeless prevention panel' took place. This is a regular forum, chaired by Children's Services where any service can refer a case and all housing options are considered for the young person. The panel has representatives from local authority housing departments, Children's Services, Youth Justice, Care leaver teams and supported housing providers. This is another new tool to ensure the rising numbers of young people facing homelessness are managed effectively.

9. Consultation and the Homelessness Review

In 2008 the Council conducted a review of homelessness in the borough. The Review highlighted many positive aspects of the housing services available in Reigate and Banstead, as well as identifying gaps and trends. Consultation with service users and the review have informed this strategy.

9.1 Key Findings and Challenges:

9.1.1 Housing Options

The customer survey and homelessness prevention outcomes have highlighted the important role of the rent deposit scheme operated by YMCA NextStep and the private rented sector generally. The NextStep scheme has been highly successful at attracting landlords and placing households in the private sector. This scheme enables a large proportion of households that would otherwise become homeless to find suitable accommodation in the borough.

During the last few years, the number of households seeking housing advice who also experience significant consumer debt, rent or mortgage arrears and other social, health or welfare problems has increased. Housing advice frequently includes advice on managing debt and budgeting, as well as negotiation with private and public sector landlords and mortgage lenders. In many cases negotiation has enabled applicants to stay put and agree arrears re-payment plans. Unfortunately in other cases the level of arrears is so high that landlords or lenders seek repossession of the property.

It is well recognised nationally that there is a link between homelessness, low income households and unemployment. The Council, in partnership with Elmbridge BC, Epsom & Ewell BC, Mole Valley DC, and Tandridge DC secured government funding to become a Trailblazer project area in 2010. Applicants in these authorities are offered advice on training, employment, and childcare as well as housing advice. This scheme received temporary funding and will cease in 2012. Other schemes are being investigated for 2012 onwards that require no council resources.

The borough works with a number of supported housing providers with accommodation or support services for a range of client groups. However, it continues to be a challenge to secure accommodation for adults with complex problems which include alcohol/drug use, mental health problems and a history of offending.

9.1.2 Young People

Despite the Schools project, recently more young people are approaching the Council for accommodation than in the past. Typically they are unable to afford to secure their own accommodation and frequently lack the lifestyle skills to maintain a tenancy. The Council has in place a protocol between Surrey housing authorities and Surrey Children, Schools and Families Directorate for assisting homeless 16 and 17 year olds. The purpose of the protocol is to assess homelessness approaches from young people jointly, with a view to agreeing which agency is best placed to take responsibility, taking account of the Housing Act 1996, Homelessness Act 2002 and Children's Act 1989 & 2004 for providing accommodation. The agency approached by the young person takes the lead organising and undertaking the assessment within a specified period of time. However, we are aware there is a shortage of specialist accommodation for young people with challenging behaviour including drug and alcohol problems and also those with children themselves.

9.1.3 Statutory Homelessness

Accepted homelessness applications have reduced substantially by 89% from 206 in 2004/05 to 22 in 2010/11. This reduction is a result of the homelessness prevention approach adopted by Housing Services and the use of assured shorthold tenancies provided by Registered Providers. These tenancies were offered to households on the brink of homelessness. For the small number of households accepted by the Council as unintentionally homeless and in priority need, the main causes of homelessness are eviction by parent, other relative or friend, loss of assured shorthold tenancy, and relationship breakdown.

This has highlighted a need for measures to tackle these causes. The underlying factors in many of these causes of homelessness stem from the need for the household to understand their responsibilities and commitments, a lack of understanding of the benefits available and the need for the Council to be alerted by other agencies of households in difficulty at an early stage. A fixed term post of Accommodation Sustainment Officer was created in 2011 to work at an early stage with these households. The officer's role includes financial inclusion work and attending court with the tenant / home owner to assist with their defence. This is the first time the Council's Housing department has had a presence in the County Court.

9.1.4 Accommodation Options

The Council continues to use temporary accommodation to discharge our statutory homeless duty. These households will usually move into permanent social rented accommodation through Homechoice.

The private rented sector is a good and practical solution for many households in housing need. This sector can offer households the right sized property in an area of their choice. The Council takes a proactive approach to engaging with local landlords through regular landlord events, offering tenancy sustainment to private landlords and tenants and identifying future vacancies arising from private tenants being housed via Homechoice.

Although about 170 new affordable homes were delivered on average over the past five years, the annual figure is beginning to decline. This is primarily due to the “credit crunch” in 2007-2008 and the continuing difficult economic conditions, in particular the downturn in the housing market; also to changes to the funding of affordable housing from 2011. In 2010/11 the number of new affordable homes was only 153 and the outlook for the current and immediate future years is that even less affordable units may be delivered. The affordable housing figures above include a range of tenures. However, the households in greatest need, and most households that approach the Council as homeless, will require rented accommodation. The number of new rented affordable homes has varied between 54 and 99 each year over the past five years.

9.1.5 Future levels of Homelessness

Since local authorities first published their homelessness strategies in the summer of 2003, there have been significant changes, nationally and locally, to how homelessness is addressed. The most notable is that homelessness is prevention based rather than reactionary and crisis driven.

Mirroring experiences in other parts of the country, there have also been perceptible changes in the profiles and types of households who seek advice and assistance from homelessness services. For example, there have been increases in the number of people with complex needs who tend to absorb disproportionate amounts of front-line service time and resource.

Having talked to our service users and stakeholders and having analysed homelessness data, there are a number of areas that we are concerned about in terms of future trends in homelessness and housing need. Of most significance are our concerns about:

- The rising numbers of young people who will approach the service, because they cannot afford to access their own housing unassisted

- The increasing numbers who we think will approach because of rising costs of home ownership and the risk of mortgage repossession
- The impact that the changes to Local Housing Allowance will have on our customers' ability to access and remain in the private rented market, including the expansion of the Shared Accommodation Rate to include tenants under 35 from January 2012
- The impact of a reduction in the Local Housing Allowance rate on those looking for private rented accommodation and for households renewing claims for existing lets that may have a shortfall in the amount paid through no fault of their own
- The proposed reduction of Tax Credits and Child Benefit resulting in lower household income
- The impact that the changes to the Council Tax assistance scheme (formerly Council Tax Benefit) from 2013 will have on our customers' finances, particularly for working age customers
- The proposed payment of Housing Benefit and Universal Credit, directly to customers for tenants of Registered Providers, which could lead to increased levels of arrears and homelessness, particularly where payment was previously paid to the Registered Provider
- Further changes introduced resulting from welfare reform and the introduction of Universal Credit from October 2013
- The low value of the pound in Europe resulting in higher numbers of 'ex-pats' returning to the UK as homeless
- Rising numbers of households experiencing unemployment
- The increasing numbers of households approaching for housing advice with complex needs including combinations of drug / alcohol abuse, mental health problems, ex-offenders
- The new Affordable Homes Programme 2011-15:
 - which is likely to reduce the amount of new affordable housing in Surrey; and
 - the introduction of the new Affordable Rent tenure will make new affordable housing, and a growing proportion of existing affordable housing, less affordable
- Some of the proposals in the *Local Decisions: A Fairer Future for Social Housing* consultation, including ending of lifetime tenancies and changes to waiting list criteria, may have a detrimental effect on preventing and responding to homelessness.

Given the economic and social challenges facing many households in the future, and the even greater demands on the Housing Options service, it is expected that rates of homelessness will substantially increase in the coming years.